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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم

THE QUR'ĀNIC SOLUTION OF PAKISTAN'S EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

FAZLUR RAHMAN

I

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

The purpose of education, according to the Qur'ān, is to develop the inner faculties of man——in such a way that all the knowledge gained by him will become organic to his total creative personality.[1] This will enable him to exploit the forces of nature for the betterment of mankind and the creation of a just, progressive and healthy world-order. It follows that man's mind should be enabled to become creative of pure knowledge, to use this knowledge in proper and constructive channels. There is no ban in Islam on acquiring *any* form of knowledge whatsoever, and, indeed, all knowledge is beneficial. The only over-riding principle is that human knowledge may not be allowed to run riot with him and lead him to the brink of self-destruction instead of being used for salutary ends both for the individual and the society.

The Qur'ān directs the severest possible criticism against such pursuit of material knowledge which would work for the detriment of moral values. It says, "Say: shall we tell you of those whose works have come to naught? It is those people whose efforts have become lost in the (naked) pursuit of materialistic life (*al-ḥayāti'd-dunyā*) and they think they have achieved great things" (XVIII: 104-105). The Qur'ān taunts this type of people saying: "This is the be-all and end-all of their knowledge" (LIII: 30). The one-sided pursuit of worldly gain makes people's thinking so negative that, according to the Qur'ān, it becomes even difficult for them to imagine that their knowledge could be used in a better and more constructive way. "Whenever these people are asked not to sow corruption on earth, they retort 'we are only putting things right' " (II: 11). It follows that the first responsibility of educators is to attune the minds of their pupils on sound moral lines. In other words, Islamic education is basically ideological and, therefore, can, by its very nature, not remain indifferent to the values involving perception of right and wrong.

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Islam, therefore, casts a grave duty on the shoulders of those in charge of education. It is the way a society is educated that will make the difference between progress and retardation, between survival and annihilation. The Qur'ān tells us, "mischief and corruption have become rampant on land and sea because of what man himself has earned (by way of misdeeds)" (XXX: 41). According to the Qur'ān, therefore, those who miseducate people are worthy of "double punishment"[2] because they bear their own misdeeds as well as those of the succeeding generations whom they have misled by a form of education which is more harmful in the long run than useful.

It is in this background that the Qur'ān very often speaks of the pair of concepts, partly antithetical and partly complementary, viz. *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirah*. In this context, *al-dunyā* means "the lower values", the purely materialistic side of life, sheer worldly gains and their satisfaction. *Al-ākhirah*, on the other hand, denotes the "other side", i.e. the higher values, the finer and moral ends of life. These higher values are the *purpose* for which the lower values exist and must be pursued. The Qur'ān tells us, "they know only the exterior (i.e., the materialistic) side of life ظاهر الحيوة الدنيا and are quite oblivious of the other side (of life) الآخرة. Have they not looked deep into their own selves? (And, indeed, the universe, for) God has not created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them except with a purpose and a definite term; but most people do not realize that they shall come face to face with their Lord. Have they not, indeed, travelled on earth and studied the fate of those people who were before them?" (XXX: 7-9).

In this passage, the Qur'ān asks man to study his own nature, the nature of the universe and the history of human societies on this earth deeply and carefully and to draw moral lessons from them in order to wield his knowledge properly and not indulge in conduct which has been destructive of other societies. It is incumbent on an Islamic State, therefore, to draw up a plan of education in such a manner that a human-positive attitude would be inculcated among those who would come out of this educational system as products. An Islamic State has to take this matter with grave seriousness and cannot neglect it except on pain of accepting the consequences which have beset earlier societies[3] and are besetting the present "developed" societies in their mutual relations and confrontations before our own eyes. The end of education is to save man *from himself by himself for himself*. Iqbal voices this critique of the Qur'ān directed against pure and naked technology when he puts

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the following question to his preceptor, Mawlānā Rūmī:—

"A perceiving eye sheds tears of blood;
Modern knowledge spells disaster for the values of Faith",

and Mawlānā Rūmī replies:—

"If you use knowledge purely on your body, it will be as poisonous as a snake;
But if you use your knowledge on your heart, it will be your friend."[4]

It is because of this quality of knowledge, viz., that it is a double-edged weapon and has to be wielded carefully and responsibly that it is as fundamentally important to use it rightly as it is to acquire it. Muslims are enjoined as a duty to acquire knowledge. It is such a fundamental duty that it devolves upon every one individually to acquire it.[5] And yet it is equally important to acquire it in a manner that it would further the salutary and constructive ends of mankind instead of proving a disaster for it. It is this knowledge which the Qur'ān constantly terms *nūr* or 'light' and *hidāyah* or 'guidance'.[6] It literally supplies man with inner eyes with which to see his path.[7]

In short, the first criterion which knowledge worthy of its name must satisfy is a sense of responsibility. Knowledge pursued without the proper awakening of the corresponding moral consciousness does not constitute "guidance" and "light", but leads to corruption, decay and destruction of man. The Qur'ān, therefore, terms it *ḍalāl* i.e., misdirectedness[8]. That is to say, knowledge must possess an inherent tendency to be used for the end of the positive service and betterment of mankind. Thus, knowledge is not just a body of propositions.

II

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

In our article entitled: 'The Qur'ānic Concept of God, the Universe and Man'[9], we pointed out that all knowledge is based on three sources. The first source is the physical universe. The phenomena of the physical world must be studied and this investigation is naturally endless. On the basis of these data the laws governing the working of the physical world have to be discovered and integrated to yield a total picture of the universe.

Apart from leading to a total knowledge of the universe, the Qur'ān is keenly interested in harnessing these data for producing beneficial results for mankind. In other words, this knowledge must lead to tech-

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nological development of the society. We deduced ample evidence from the Qur'ān, in the above-mentioned article, to the effect that this entire universe was created in order to be conquered by man. Science must, therefore, be used for the serviceable ends of mankind.

Besides the physical universe, the constitution of the human mind must be investigated with equal intensity. The Qur'ān emphasizes the study of the "inner world" i.e. the human mind (*al-anfus*).[10] The data obtained through these investigations concerning the working of the human mind and its motivation, moral as well as psychological, must be used to cure imbalance, delinquencies and the raising of the moral standards of mankind. It will greatly help in the raising of individual and collective moral standards and eliminating criminal tendencies in man. The proper aim of this knowledge is to create a balanced, healthy, confident and creative human personality.

Thirdly, the Qur'ān is equally emphatic, as we showed earlier, on the historical study of societies. A correct appreciation of other cultures, societies and religions must yield positive results in several directions. It will broaden the horizon of the human mind and remove bigotry and narrow-mindedness. It will enable us not only to judge others in terms of successes and failures but also to see our own virtues as virtues and our vices as vices. History, if genuinely and seriously pursued, necessarily leads to a comparative study of one's own society with that of others, and is a necessary instrument of self-criticism and self-assessment. History thus results in sociology.

All human knowledge is based on and arises from the data collected from these three sources. There is no other independent source of knowledge. The higher flights of the human mind, the analytic and synthetic operations of the human intellect and spirit in the realms of creative thought——both religious and mundane—must in the first place be based upon and related to the data gained from these three sources by an empirical and experimental method. It must be clearly understood that no genuine knowledge is possible, either religious or non-religious, without being based on observation and induction.[11] Only after induction comes deduction. In other words, experimental knowledge and the empirical and scientific method pursued through observation is the sole avenue of materials of human knowledge. It is important to emphasize this fact since, in the *later* medieval ages, the Muslims turned their backs almost completely on scientific and inductive knowledge gained through experience and observation and have been indulging in pure speculation.[12] The result of this unfortunate develop-

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ment has been that they have incarcerated themselves in a vacant shell of theological speculation, mystic deliriums and an unrealistic, exaggerative and purely technical poetry without genuine insight and inspiration. The truth is that acquaintance with the actual data yielded by observation and experiment are necessary not only for science but also for meaningful theology, genuine mysticism and really inspired poetry. Even these pursuits become a vain play, indeed, fraudulent when the human mind is divorced from actual touch with reality.

After grasping fully that all knowledge is rooted in observation and experimentation, the second fundamental characteristic of knowledge must be noted. This is that knowledge by its very nature is ever-growing and dynamic; it can never lie stationary and stagnant. Stagnation and repetition is the death of knowledge. All knowledge, whether inductive or deductive based upon the former, is an endless creative *process*. The crown of all the Prophets, Muḥammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) was himself taught by the Qur'ān to pray, "O God! increase my knowledge constantly" (XX: 114). The Qur'ān further tells us that no matter how much one knows, there is always the possibility of further growth of knowledge and that "above every knower there is always another knower" (XII: 76). Indeed, this endless pursuit of knowledge both by the method of observation—induction—and deduction, is cast like a fundamental duty on Muslims. The Prophet is reported to have said that a person engaged in the active pursuit of knowledge is infinitely superior to a person who constantly engages himself only in ritual prayers[13]—such is the exalted place of knowledge in the sight of God as an '*Ibādah*.'

Proper pursuit of knowledge, described in the manner above, confers upon man that balance of humility and self-confidence which is his correct place in this universe and which renders man truly human. There is another saying attributed to the Prophet and universally accepted by Muslims that they must pursue knowledge to the farthest end of the world; "even unto China."[14]

The third fundamental characteristic of knowledge is that it is a developing and yet an organic whole. Fragmentation of knowledge, although it is artificially necessary for specialized work and research in a given field, is, nevertheless, not the final end of the knowledge-process. Specialization and isolated research is only a necessary step because it creates new data and increases the volume of knowledge. But at each step there must be creative minds sufficiently endowed with power of thought which can integrate the various threads of this knowledge into

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a total organic picture. Unbridled indulgence in pure fragmented knowledge renders a man into a robot, a purely mechanical being. Fragmentation of knowledge ultimately results into a vicious fragmentation of the human personality and makes him oblivious of the real overall human needs. Our age is generally suffering from the results of this fragmentation of knowledge and personality. Science, therefore, is liable to be used for inhuman ends and knowledge, instead of being a guide for man, threatens destruction.

Indeed, the amoral knowledge or immoral knowledge (the end of both being the same) is also the result of a fundamental fragmentation of knowledge to which the modern world has largely fallen a deliberate prey in the name of certain extreme forms of "liberalism". Whereas modern science has provided the glitter of life and has put at the disposal of man vast potentialities, both formative and destructive; modern civilization tends, as a whole, to be blind to genuinely moral bases of life. It is this kind of purely technological life, devoid of human and moral depth, which the Qur'ān denounces as "stuck to the exterior of life" (XXX: 7). This is also the burden of Iqbal's critique of the modern Western civilization.[15]

III

OUR PRESENT PROBLEM

Our present educational system and the learning imparted in the country is unfortunately suffering in varying degrees from all the evils and negative factors which can afflict this field of life. To begin with, our society suffers from an almost universal indifference and apathy to the importance of knowledge. It is ironical, indeed, that a people whose religious teaching takes its stand squarely on the platform of knowledge and whose predecessors have accomplishments to show to the world which are truly dazzling in all the branches of knowledge, should care so little for the acquisition of learning and set so little value on it. On examination, however, this problem seems to be much more complex than it appears at first sight. An attack on this problems, if it is to be effective within a reasonable period of time, will have to be multilateral.

First of all, we have the ideological problem. We have not effectively been able to relate the importance of knowledge with our ideological orientation. The result is that our people are not *inspired* to learn. They seem to have no goal in life. In general, there has been a failure to link

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our national achievements, economic as well as educational, with our ideological imperatives. People do not feel that they stand under any moral command of Islamic conscience to acquire knowledge. This campaign must be effectively started on a mass-scale. The first command of the Qur'ān to the Prophet was "Read (*Iqra'*)".

Secondly, and closely related with the above, is our basic calamity that there exists a dualism—indeed, a dichotomy in our systems of learning. On the one hand is the so-called 'Ulamā's system, vigorously pursued in Madrasahs, which is so outmoded that it is to-day positively harmful in its results. The products of this system do not live in the modern world and are not contemporaries of this age. Their curricula and syllabi have to be radically and suitably modified to bring them in line with the requirements of modern times. Basic principles of social sciences, a modern scientific world-view and a good general world-history, along with modern humanities, must be made part of their syllabi in addition to specifically religious disciplines. But equally important is the fact that our modern educational system, imparted in the universities, has developed out of touch with our ideology and the cultural and social values inculcated by this ideology. The student is not inspired with any noble ideal. The tragic result is that our educational standards are deteriorating and, under the sudden impact of economic development, even the basic minimal sense of honesty and responsibility threatens to disappear. Thus, both these systems of education are afflicted with the worst possible form of fragmentation. This calls for immediate attention.

As a result of this state of affairs, our pursuit of knowledge is generally sterile, stolid and uncreative. That the Madrasah system is unoriginal and uncreative is, of course, patent and generally recognized. But unfortunately, even our modern educational system is largely so. We have now had approximately a century of modern education among us and yet our seats of modern learning have been able to add precious little of real originality and worth to the fund of human knowledge. Particularly in humanities and social sciences the quality of our scholarship is extremely low. But it should be borne in mind that unless we produce thinking men of good quality in humanities and social sciences, we cannot hope to make much worthwhile contribution even in pure sciences. Pure science cannot be cultivated in a vacuum and in isolation from the rest of knowledge. The main cause, no doubt, is just this form of fragmentation we have pointed out and the lack of inspiration which has its necessary consequences. The result is that our knowledge remains, by

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and large, static and is robbed of the dynamic quality which the Qur'ān is so insistent upon. We are essentially imitators, good imitators at best, not original contributors.

Connected with this is another problem of equal importance, that of language. So far as higher education and thought are concerned, we are a people without a language. We have introduced extraneous and political motives into the solution of this most fundamental issue on which depends our mental growth itself. It should be understood clearly that pure concepts never arise in mind; concepts take their birth along with words. If there are no words (because there is no adequate language), fruitful concepts are not born. Parrot-like imitation and repetition is the result, and not original thinking. The language controversy, it is submitted, should be detached from political emotionalism and we ought to develop at present one language adequately and quickly for we are racing against time. The progressive world is not going to wait for us, nor shall it have any particular reason to show mercy for our suicidal failures.

Even our objective of surviving as one nation demands that we have one language. Having decided for that language, we must develop it sincerely and without loss of time. We must make incumbent upon ourselves to think, write and read in that language. Frankly speaking, in so far as we do any worthwhile thinking, it is done in English and yet English to us has remained a foreign language as a nation. In spite of this, we have not been able to develop Urdu, or, for that matter, Bengali, with the sincerity and urgency that they deserve. Both these languages have a history and literature and certainly have potentialities of development—with Urdu having the additional advantage of being closely linked with our traditional past. But the language issue has unfortunately become the subject of emotional political wrangling. While we thus wrangle, our minds naturally must decay so far as fruitful, creative thought is concerned.

Parrot-like repetition of terms and phrases still remains the bed-rock of our method of education, partly, as has been pointed out above, as a necessary consequence of our not having a really expressive language capable of sustained thought-processes. But partly it is also an unfortunate legacy from our Madrasah educational system. For the past several centuries, our Madrasah education had tended to concentrate on books rather than on subjects. Pupils were taught to learn by rote, not to cultivate creative thinking. Closely allied to this practice was the growth of a pernicious concept of knowledge, not as something creative,

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but as something acquired. Things which were "there" either in books or in the minds of teachers had to be *acquired and stored up*. This was "*'Ilm.*" We have amply shown that this concept is diametrically opposed to the view of knowledge as a ceaseless growth upheld by Qur'ān. The tragedy is that even in our modern educational institutions learning by rote is largely practised and our mechanical text-book teaching and conducting examinations perpetuate this vice.

A fundamental reconstruction of our educational system in Pakistan is absolutely imperative. Our first and foremost problem is that our masses are by and large illiterate and ignorant. Since the Qur'ān is so emphatic on the acquisition of knowledge that even its first revelation was about "reading" and "writing" and it even forbids to pursue a course of action without having proper knowledge of it (XVI : 36), it is the fundamental duty of both the Government and the society to introduce a system of total education in the country. It may almost be said that an uneducated man can hardly be properly a Muslim because he cannot really know what is demanded of him in the world today.

Alongside of this massive problem of being an uneducated nation (which we are), we have to address ourselves to the problem of the fragmentation of knowledge just spoken of. Indeed, this fragmentation of knowledge has fallen upon us with a redoubled force because of the dichotomy of the modern lay educational system and the old, out-worn and static educational system still pursued in the Madrasahs of the 'Ulamā'. We have to integrate this dichotomy into a whole and an *organic* whole. If we do not do this soon enough, even our industrial and scientific progress is not going to strike deep roots, become fertile and lead us to make original contributions in these fields themselves. We must undertake the unification of the educational system. We must also develop a language of our own which can do justice both to our traditional aspirations and to the demand of creative knowledge. Finally, we must radically change our methods of instruction in examination.

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NOTES

1. For example, II: 151 reads: "Even as we have sent among you a messenger from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs and causes you to grow and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you that which you knew not".
2. "O our Lord! These led us astray, so give them a double punishment of Fire." VII: 38.
3. The eminent historian of Science, George Sarton, has concluded that the cause of the decadence and fall of the Greek spirit was that their intellectual activities were "hopelessly out of proportion to their political wisdom and their morality". He investigated as to what impact the Jewish and the Christian religions made on the Greek culture, and finally observed: "The immense cultural importance of Islam lies in the fact that it finally brought together the two great intellectual (i.e. the Semitic religious and the Greek pagan) streams which had flowed independently in ancient times. Previous attempts, as I have already indicated, had failed. Jews and Greeks had mixed in Alexandria but, in spite of the fact that the former had learned the language of the latter and that one of their learned men, Philo, had made a deep study of both traditions, there had been no real fusion. The Christians had not succeeded any better, because of their single-hearted devotion to the new Gospel, which reduced everything else to futility in their eyes. *Now, for the first time in the history of the world, Semitic religion and Greek knowledge actually combined in the minds of many people* (Italics added). Nor was that integration restricted to a single city or country; the new culture spread like a prairie fire from Baghdad eastward to India, Transoxiana and further still, and westward to the very edge of the world." (George Sarton, *The Life of Science*, New York, 1948, 142-48).
4. The original text is as follows:—

مریدِ ہندی : چشمِ بینا سے ہے جاری جوئے خوں
علمِ حاضر سے ہے دیں زار و زبوں
پیرِ رومی : علم را بر تن زنی مارے بود
علم را بر دل زنی یارے بود

Bāl-i-Jibrīl, Lahore, 1959, 180.

5. The Prophet is reported to have said: طلب العلم فريضة على كلّ مسلمٍ ("Pursuit of knowledge is the bounden duty of every Muslim"). This *ḥādīth* is recorded by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Ibn 'Adī, al-Bayhaqī, al-Tabarānī, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, and many others, see al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, Hyderabad-Deccan 1313 A.H., V: 200 (Nos. 4034-37).
6. V: 17, 47, 48, XXIV: 40; etc.
7. Cf. "For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind but it is the hearts which are within the breasts that grow blind." (XXII: 64).
8. See, for instance, LIII: 28-30: "And they have no knowledge thereof; they follow only (their) surmises, and a surmise can never take the place of the truth. So turn thou (O Prophet,) from him who turns away from Our remembrance and desires only the material side of life. Such is their sum of knowledge. Surely thy Lord knows very well those who are misguided (*man ḍalla 'an sabīlihī*), and He knows very well those who are guided."

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9. *Islamic Studies*, Vol. VI, No. 1, March 1967, pp. 9-10.

10. See, for instance, "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons (i.e. in the physical world) and in their inner self (*wa fī anfusihim*) till it is manifest to them that it is the Truth". (XLI: 53).

11. The Qur'ān denounces those people who do not employ their senses and do not observe the universe; "they have hearts wherewith they understand not, and have eyes wherewith they see not, and have ears wherewith they hear not. These are as the cattle—nay, but they are worse" (VII: 179). The Qur'ān is full of the descriptions of nature as revealed to the sense-perception of man from which mankind is exhorted to infer the general laws.

Empiricism, the spirit of experimentation, and readiness to discard what has been proved to be wrong,—viz. the acceptance of the Qur'ānic maxim: "That must perish which perishes by the clear proof and that must survive which survives by the clear proof" (VIII: 43)—were prominent characteristics of the Prophetic *Sunnah*. In a famous *ḥadīth*, reported by a number of Companions and recorded by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Cairo, 1955, IV: 1835-36) and by other canonical works (Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Lucknow, 1309 A.H., Maṭba' Aṣaḥḥ al-Maṭābi', p. 180; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Cairo, 1213 A.H., V: 16, 298; VI: 128), the Prophet is reported to have first forbidden the grafting of male date-palms with the female ones, but when he later came to know the ill-effects of this advice of his, he courageously said, "In the worldly affairs you are not bound to accept my advice, for, you know the affairs of your world better than me". Even in the religious, supra-mundane, affairs he habitually employed the empirical method. For instance, when he felt the necessity of instituting a proper method of the call to prayer, he discussed it with his Companions and a comparative study of the customs of the adherents of other religions in this matter was made. Finally, the form of *adhān* as suggested by 'Umar was considered to be the most plausible one and was, therefore, accepted. There is another very significant incident. The Arabs of the pre-Islamic times, as much as the Africans of to-day, had a taboo against the practice of *ghīlah*, i.e. having conjugal relations with one's wife during the two years of her lactation period. The Prophet wanted to continue this ban, but he is reported to have said, "I would have forbidden the practice of *ghīlah*, if I had not known that the Persians and the Romans practise it (without any apparent harm to them)." (Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭā*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Cairo, 1951, II: 607-08; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. idem, Cairo, 1955, II: 1066-67).

12. What we have said here is true only of the later medieval ages. Otherwise, in the earlier period of their intellectual activity, Muslims followed the Qur'ānic precept of using the inductive and empirical method for acquiring knowledge (see note 11, above). Iqbal, in his lecture on 'the Spirit of Muslim Culture' (*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1962, 124-45), has dealt at length with this subject and has quoted extensively from Briffault's *Making of History* to show that the scientific method owes its existence to the Arabs. We may add here the observation of George Sarton that the creation of the experimental spirit, or more exactly, its slow incubation was primarily due to Muslims down to the end of the twelfth century (*Life of Science, op cit.*, 159. See also his monumental work, *Intro-*

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duction to the History of Science, Baltimore 1927-48, Vol. I, Chapters XXVIII-XXXIV and Vol. II, Part I).

How the 'closing of the door of *Ijtihād*' during the tenth and eleventh centuries led to the general stagnation of the intellectual sciences in the twelfth and the succeeding centuries is described by us in *Islam* (London, 1966, 186-92).

13. The Prophet is reported to have said, "The scholar is as superior to the worshipful as I am superior to the least of you". "Pursuit of knowledge is better in God's eye than the prayer, the fasting, the pilgrimage and the *jihād* in the Way of Allah". "One hour's pursuit of knowledge is better than praying the whole night through and one day's pursuit of knowledge is better than fasting for three months." (al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, *op. cit.*, Traditions Nos. 4038-39. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Faḍlihī*, Cairo, n.d., has a full chapter on the superiority of knowledge over *'ibādah*, pp. 21-7).
14. *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, *op. cit.*, Nos. 4090-91. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi'*, *op. cit.*, 9.
15. *Reconstruction*, *op. cit.*, 18-9. The elaboration of this idea in his poetry is too numerous to be quoted here.

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